

**The Global Importance of Fable, Folk, and Fairy Tales: A Brief Anthology of Three Japanese Fairy Tales**

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**By**

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## Abstract

Fairy tales, folk stories, and other kinds of fables have been used for centuries around the world as a way to not only tell creative stories, but impart important lessons to children of all ages. While it is true that there are some common fairy tales which other countries and cultures then adapt to better fit their own needs and norms, the types of characters from original stories around the world tend to all fall together in specific roles. My translation of three Japanese fairy tales, "The Crane's Repayment", "Momotaro", and "Princess Kaguya", introduces my readers to types of characters they might be familiar with, but in ways that could be completely culturally new. The heroes of these stories, a farmer, a child who grows up to be a hero, and a mysterious princess, are common echoes of archetypes found in fairy tales from around the world, and yet each explains something new and different about the Japanese culture from which they come. I present these translations in the hope that my readers will learn to appreciate something new about Japanese fairy tales, and maybe pick back up the old ones they knew as a child, in the hopes that they can read these stories with new eyes, and see what all they have to offer.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Kazumi Matsumoto for being my advisor for the duration of my project. Her patience and guidance while I worked this semester, and belief in my project from its earliest stages, made everything possible.

I also wish to thank the Honors College staff, and my professors from the English, Japanese, and Technology departments, because this project came to be only by the combination of amazing skills and guidance I have accrued from your classes over the past four years.

And finally, I want to thank my parents, for their relentless encouragement and undying faith. Thank you for telling me stories when I was little—it's the best gift I could have ever imagined.

### Author's Statement: The Global Importance of Fable, Folk, and Fairy Tales

Humans have always been driven to tell stories, regardless of their country, language, or even the time they live in. One of the most fascinating things I have encountered in my literature studies has been the recurring themes that crop up in fairy and folk tales around the world. While some of them come from a common story that traveled country to country over the years, others speak to common themes, but still remain unique to their country of origin. This study has had me looking in depth at stories that I had encountered early on in my study of the Japanese language, but had not until now been equipped to look at them not just for their language value, but also their greater thematic content, and place in the greater framework of global folk tales.

For this undertaking, I worked with three Japanese folk tales: The Crane's Repayment, Momotaro, and Princess Kaguya. All three feature themes commonly found in tales from all times; a good deed repaid in kind by a mystical creature and strange goings on, a child of strange origins with a larger destiny, and a boy from humble beginnings who goes on a great adventure. While it does not come as a surprise to someone who has studied stories from around the world for quite some time, I have encountered people who, when told about my project, were a bit shocked to hear that stories with such similar themes as found in the European fairy tales can come from a country as seemingly disparate as Japan. I can't ease the confusion any better than with author Terri Windling's explanation of fairy tales; "A proper fairy tale...goes to the very heart of truth. It goes to the very hearts of men and women and speaks of the things it finds there: fear, courage, greed, compassion, loyalty, betrayal, despair, and wonder. It speaks of these things in a symbolic language that slips into our dreams, our



unconscious, steeped in rich archetypal images," (Windling 4). Windling goes on to discuss mythologist and writer Joseph Campbell's work on comparative mythologies of the world, and his conclusion that humanity has a great shared "mythology" that we all draw on (5). Campbell, most known for his books such as *The Hero with a Thousand faces* and *The Power of Myth*, was a writer and mythologist best known for his analysis of the hero's journey, and the importance of myth and ceremony within society today. Specifically, he spent time working with the ideas of archetypes that occur in civilizations and stories the world over (Campbell). Through this shared mythos, the human spirit is remarkably similar regardless of where it is found on Earth; humans have grown, survived, endured, and one of the key elements of that survival were the stories that were passed down. Each civilization has them, has had them for centuries; and yet many are still told today, despite their humble origins. Many adults often feel that they have outgrown them, or there is nothing left to learn from "stories meant for children"; but there's the rub—these stories were never meant for children alone. As a whole, stories of folk lore, faerie, *Märchen*, however you see it fit to call them, were about the greater issues in life, and the stories and lessons that our predecessors felt were vital, for whatever reason, to pass on to the next generations.

Growing up the daughter of a school librarian, and amidst a family full of teachers of various age groups, the need for stories for all ages was impressed upon me as long as I can remember. One of the most time-worn and treasured volumes at one of my grandmother's houses was an aged collection of fairy tales, poems, and folk lore. The book was illustrated, hard bound, and older than I could've imagined, although it was probably not as old as my four year old mind imagined it to be. But my grandmother, great-grandmother, and I spent

countless hours poring over the same stories over and over again; I couldn't get enough! Something kept drawing me back to these stories, these tales of adventurers and princesses and counting the miles to Babylon. They never once changed, but I remained enchanted all the same. Alongside those, I also had quite the collection of Disney films building as well. Many of the stories from that collection were also in movie format: *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, and *Aladdin* to name a few. But even though they were vastly different, I loved them both. As I grew older, and encountered even more and more versions of all of these stories, written and film alike, something started to click for me, although I do not think I had quite the right words until the past several years. Children are drawn to these stories for a reason. Not necessarily because they're simplistic, or talk down to them, or always have happy endings—Quite the opposite! Most of the tales I read in that original fated anthology had much sharper turns than their Disney counterparts; not to say the Disney films don't have their own merits, of course. No, what Wilding summarized so well earlier, is the fact that fairy tales can tell children, even if indirectly, that things will be alright. Trials can be endured, survived, and overcome. Courage can win the day if you only know how to draw on it. Cleverness can be more important than brute force. Friendship and family can be the best thing, or the worst, and you must take care. Stories with morals can be a bit ham-fisted when delivered straight; if the answer to the question of "What are you supposed to learn from this?" is handed to you on a platter, then even a child will turn away and can avoid the lesson altogether. But these tales take a different approach. They teach without teaching, and let the reader learn without learning. Most readers might be surprised by the extreme nature of the stepmother's actions in a story like "The Juniper Tree", where her method of solving her problems involves beheading her stepson

(Grimm 214). But the underlying lessons do still shine through: cruelty and murder are wrong, but being kind and helping others will eventually help you in turn.

One thing you quickly learn while studying these stories is that not every tale has the quintessential happy ending, but I've always felt they were important to be read none the less. Whether it was a tragic ending like Andersen's "The Little Mermaid", or a sad inevitability like the death of "The Little Matchstick Girl", there is a lesson to be learned, even in tragedy (Andersen). Now, the trick with these written stories, is that the bias of both the author and translators come through. Andersen, like the Brothers Grimm, compiled many of his stories from variations on tales he heard while traveling, or from the people around him. Eventually, they were written down in some format, with more or less explanation of origin being given for each. In *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*, Editor Maria Tartar explains before each tale a brief history of how each story came to be (xv-xxi). Some have long, storied histories, where a tale had been well known in a region, and was preserved as best possible. Others were cobbled together piecemeal from a variety of different stories—one of the most familiar of the bunch would be "The Singing, Soaring Lark" (Grimm 317). From the first lines, it is clearly an interpretation of Beauty and the Beast; everything is there from the merchant father who sets out to bring back gifts for his three daughters, and the youngest wants something unusual, but there it takes a turn, and the heroine instead asks for the titular singing, soaring lark. This is where the Brothers have decided to blend it with something closer to the Norwegian fairy tale "East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon", and the heroine must go rescue her Prince after he has been cursed once again. This blending of stories is not always so obvious, but is especially common amongst the fairy tales from the Western tradition.



While some specific tropes found in fairy tales are both firmly fixed to their time period, such as the great censoring and plot line adjustment that took place during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and their region of origin, with stories about siblings and the nature of each depending on the home county's views on birth order and temperament, the greater archetypes found among these characters seem much more universal when compared across the board (Windling 3). This is not limited to fairy and folk tales, but can be seen in literature across the genres as well. As I grew older and read more widely in school, I was introduced to a number of folk and fairy tales from around the world. While each had their own elements that were strange and foreign to ten year old me, there were also plenty of relatable factors. We had been assigned to read them for that very purpose, and it was something I was glad for as my education moved on. By the time I got to middle school and began studying foreign languages, I began to realize that each country's spin on each tale had something unique, something that was seemingly still lost in English while the grander thematic meaning was the same. I came to realize just how closely related language and culture were, and how translators might have one of the most difficult jobs in the world. I realized that I gained so much more from a foreign text if I also knew about that places history and culture, and could better fit what I was reading into context. It was no longer a matter of merely understanding characters and patterns independently, but it became one great wide map of places and people that had all be interconnected, and it was a beautiful thing for me to picture—these stories and characters, these archetypes that in a certain light, tied the world together in a ways I was only beginning to realize.

### *Found in Translation*

Now, for my work in question. The combined years of study I've done have given me countless opportunities to look at texts from around the world; the Literature track within the English department gave me a great variety of courses to choose from, and I was never for want of a new story. Likewise, my Japanese education frequently included shortened versions of many popular stories that were used for reading and translation exercises, which fleshed out my introduction to the Japanese side of folklore and fairy tales. With all of that in mind, I knew that if I could, I had to be a part of the process that keeps these stories alive.

That goal led to a whole new realm of creative and scholarly decisions that I would have to make as my work progressed. The first step was to choose the stories themselves, and there were several criteria in mind as I did my searching. First of all, the stories I chose to translate had to be feasible. While I had brief introductions to many different folk and fairy tales in my Japanese classes, they were always to the end of learning a certain grammar structure that we had been practicing, or to teach a short cultural lesson. That was all well and good, but I had always been a bit disappointed that even from my earliest days of classes in high school, the fuller versions of those texts were never a set part of our curriculum.

Fast forward to the spring of 2015, when I realized that this was my chance to make the most of my thesis project. So, I started compiling my list of potential titles to translate based off of the stories I remembered from my previous classes, as well as consulting with friends who have also studied Japanese and have encountered some of the other usual fairy tales. As I



built this list, I knew there were going to be some issues that would inherently spring up; what if this was *too* common of a story? What if it was *too* unknown? How are they going to relate? I couldn't let them all be randomly tied, there would have to be some thread connecting them. I put each potential title on my list against this set of questions. Well, while some would be considered common in Japan, most certainly aren't here. Speaking from personal experience, even my rather well-read librarian mother had never heard of almost all of my potential stories. So, given that I had always wanted my audience to be a set unfamiliar with Japanese fairy and folk tales, I took that as a step in the right direction. The next question had a similar answer; if the story was unfamiliar to me, then all the better! I could approach the piece unbiased and with a clear head and eyes. As for the third, this took maybe the most time. I wrestled with this for a while, the results of which you will read later. But the gist of it came down to: Why are these fairy tales so important? Why is any fairy tale important? From many of my literature classes, I had a laundry list of reasons that could fill several books. But the core of it always came to the same thing. These stories teach people what matters most; they provide guidance, solace, and examples of what to do when things go wrong. Many critics have tried to downplay their importance by citing periodic hysteria over certain fears or trends of the time in which the story was popularized—and that isn't wholly wrong. One thing in common with fairy and folk tales around the world is that they have a near endless list of variations and retellings, and each have their own merit that deserves its due. With that in mind, I tried to base my story selections around themes and characters that a more Western-oriented audience like the one I have here could recognize, but still find something new within the pages.

The three I settled on were based around the ideas of the child—"Momotaro", the princess—"Princess Kaguya", and the everyman—"The Crane's Repayment". Not only were they archetypal figures that I knew readers could identify right away, they also are good representations of either the good versus evil, or dealing with the consequences of your actions core morals that readers are used to. In an interesting twist, the last is also a story that acts as a name origin tale for a famous site in Japan. With that cross section represented, I knew I was headed in the right direction.

After I had the stories translated, I had several other creative decisions to make. The first was, how was I going to make these stories my own? My translations were quite literal, the first time through, so I found myself with a bit of creative leeway. One option was to try and radically change something for each story; the setting, the time period--and for a time, that did get some serious thought. But the more I drafted out ideas, I realized that I felt I was losing something important about these stories that I wanted to make sure I kept however I could. The fact is that first and foremost, these stories are from Japan. I knew that if I tried something too different from how the story had fixed itself in my mind, I was going to completely miss the point I had set out to make. One of the goals of this entire project is to show how despite all evidence to the contrary, there are common themes in fairy tales from all over the world, and something can be garnered from each of them. The small details might vary wildly, it's true. And the commonalities might only be on the outside edges of the story or its content. But at the end of the day, these fairy tales like so many others have persevered, and are still recorded and told time and again. Words have power, and it is a power that cannot be taken lightly. One of my favorite quotes on the matter comes from Neil Gaiman

paraphrasing G. K. Chesterton, and I think it summarizes why I think this genre as a whole is so important: “Fairy tales are more than true – not because they tell us dragons exist, but because they tell us dragons can be beaten.” (Gaiman). Children are smart, and they do not need to be talked down to if you want them to understand you. But as a teller of stories, it is essential to do so with the knowledge that there is every chance that whatever you write might be just what saves a reader when they need it most.

### *The Crane's Repayment* 「鶴の恩返し」

This story was one of the earliest that I decided on, as it was one of the common fairy tale type stories that I was aware of, but had yet to read myself. From the first few pages of “The Crane’s Repayment”, there is a premise of a familiar trope amongst fairy tales—the lonely peasant, who helps someone or something in trouble, and gets some kind of reward (Hashidzume). While Western fairy tales generally play up these lead characters as simpletons or even fools, the solitary nature of Yosaku in our story here helps subvert that trend. Grimm’s tales, and the majority of those of German origin that were so popularized, tried to make their hapless underdog succeed as much as possible. The fact that not only was Yosaku, the protagonist, a slight change, but also the ending was not what reader’s might expect, helped this story stay a strong contender.

What really convinced me to translate this story, from the short list I had assembled, was the fact that the ending was more melancholy than I, and I hope my readers, would expect, if they were used to only the Western canon of tales. I felt this story made a good cultural



contrast; as opposed to the “Happily ever after” readers come to in so many Western fairy tales, “Crane’s” ending with the crane leaving, never to return, offers the reader a different kind of closure, one that seemed more common among the Japanese fairy tales I have read throughout my studies. The consequences to Yosaku’s actions are presented matter-of-factly; the story doesn’t shy away from presenting a more realistic take on facing consequences. Like with “Princess Kaguya”, neither of our heroes gets what they want; Yosaku must deal with the fact that because he had uncovered the crane’s secret, she must leave. Likewise, Kaguya cannot run from her destiny, and must ultimately leave her family and the world she knew behind, never to return. Both had a similar atmosphere that I knew I needed to include in my translations.

“The Crane’s Repayment” has a familiar fairy tale premise, to be sure: a solitary, humble farmer helps an injured animal, not expecting any sort of reward. He just helps because it is the right thing to do. And then, of course, unexpectedly good things come into his life. He meets Sayo, who wants nothing but to help him and be his wife, and they are happy for a time. Standard fare for the genre, still. But now it also becomes fantastical: Sayo all along has been that same crane he helped in the field! And because of that, she wanted to repay the favor however she could, even if it meant using her own feathers to make cloth that he could sell to make enough money to live comfortably. Self-sacrifice, or doing what must be done regardless of the cost, are other common themes that I thought were important to note as a recurring thread in these various fairy tales. As stories meant primarily to teach and then entertain, seeing these common themes among many of the tales I looked into, and both “Repayment” and “Kaguya” from this collection, meant that I had touched on something that

appeared to be an important cultural note, which lined up nicely with my culture and historical knowledge I had gained through my Japanese history and culture class as well.

### *Momotaro* 「桃太郎」

I wanted to include Momotaro in this collection for a few reasons. Firstly, “Momotaro” is a story in the popular tradition of young heroes who set out to save the day, sometimes for no other reason than they can (Oda). Set against a common theme of an uncommon beginning, in this case our hero was found in a giant peach, taken in by the old woman and her husband who found him. His quick age transition to his journey to defeat the demons does make this a shorter story than the others, but also works well in the vein of it being a shorter, more child oriented story. It is all about Momotaro’s success, and his journey and making friends along the way.

Children's stories about children themselves might be some of the most important stories on record. While I believe that you don’t have to be a child to appreciate or learn things from fairy tales, I do also recognize that there is a special element to most of them that makes them particularly accessible, and angled towards younger readers and listeners. But children are the most important audience for several reasons; firstly, they have everything to learn, and almost nothing to lose. Even today we find ourselves in a fight to validate children’s and young adult literature, because some critics stalwartly believe that if something is not “classic” it has almost no use. That could not be farther from the truth. As a young listener and reader, there are common lessons that have clearly been helpful to learn and remember for years and years,

the world over. In this particular case, while a bit simple, Momotaro knows that what the demons are doing is not right. You should not hurt people, or take their things as your own. And so he sets out to right those wrongs, because it is the right thing to do. Likewise, the presence of his companions helps fit the story neatly into line with the tradition of talking animal companions. The dog, monkey, and pheasant all lend different strengths to Momotaro to aid him: the pheasant's flight and ability to see farther, most notably, but they also emphasize the importance of companionship, and working together to achieve a goal. While I don't think any of these would be considered "typical", I feel that most readers will smile at the familiarity of the spirit of the story.

### *Princess Kaguya* 「かぐや姫」

I thought this would be a fitting story to present, because it speaks to the seemingly world-wide fascination with princesses who have mysterious origins making good subjects for fairy tales; it also blends itself with the greater ending of how a very famous place, Mount Fuji, received its name (Takahashi). Both key components to the story made sure it had a near guaranteed spot on my list of stories. It seems that regardless of the time or place, tales of princesses about as one of the most common sub-genre of fairy tales and related stories. Take one glance at any children's library, and you'll find shelf after shelf of various Princesses from all over-you're almost always a stone's throw away from the next princess story book.

Be it through old fairy tale anthologies, or the variety of Disney films and their own take on the genre, as widespread as the archetype was, I knew this was something I had to



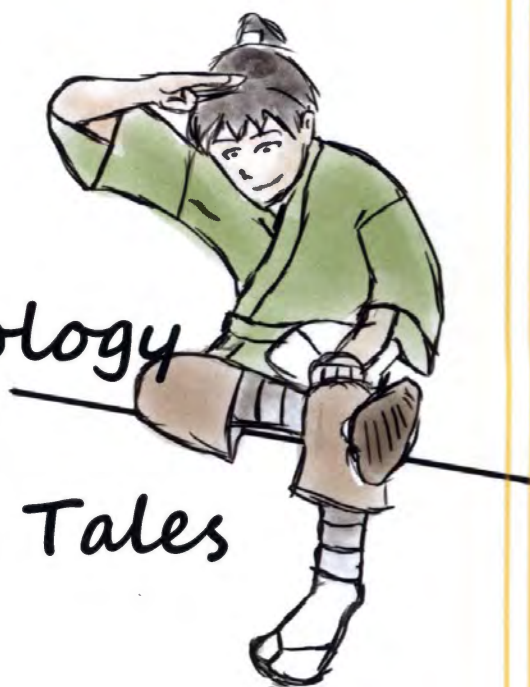
explore with this set of fairy tales. Every country and every culture has their own take on the princess story. In many cases, the same Princess story is told in a variety of ways, such as "Cinderella". However, "Princess Kaguya" does not fit as neatly into any of the well-known Western princess lore. From humble if mystical origins, she grows up to be a beautiful woman, as most princesses are wont to do. But when the suitors appear, she does her best to turn them away as much as possible, going so far as to giving them impossible tasks to complete in order to win her hand. Even after the suitors are dealt with, there is still the matter of Kaguya being not of this world, but from the moon. Kaguya's ultimate departure also leads to something I had not expected to find, which turned out to be an origin tale for how Mount Fuji got its name. The story is a fascinating blend from my perspective, and I thought she was a good example of a different kind of Princess that I wanted to translate as my way to try working in this timeless section of the genre.

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# A Brief Anthology of Japanese Fairy Tales



With Three Collected Stories:  
The Crane's Repayment  
Momotaro  
and Princess Kaguya

Translated and  
Illustrated by  
Katie Norman





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# The Global Importance of Fable, Folk, and Fairy Tales

Humans have always been driven to tell stories, regardless of their country, language, or even the time they live in. One of the most fascinating things I have encountered in my literature studies has been the recurring themes that crop up in fairy and folk tales around the world. While some of them come from a common story that traveled country to country over the years, others speak to common themes, but still remain unique to their country of origin. This study has had me looking in depth at stories that I had encountered early on in my study of the Japanese language, but had not until now been equipped to look at them not just for their language value, but also their greater thematic content, and place in the greater framework of global folk tales.

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grew older, and encountered even more and more versions of all of these stories, written and film alike, something started to click for me, although I do not think I had quite the right words until the past several years. Children are drawn to these stories for a reason. Not necessarily because they're simplistic, or talk down to them, or always have happy endings—Quite the opposite! Most of the tales I read in that original fated anthology had much sharper turns than their Disney counterparts; not to say the Disney films don't have their own merits, of course. No, what Wilding summarized so well earlier, is the fact that fairy tales can tell children, even if indirectly, that things will be alright. Trials can be endured, survived, and overcome. Courage can win the day if you only know how to draw on it. Cleverness can be more important than brute force. Friendship and family can be the best thing, or the worst, and you must take care. Stories with morals can be a bit ham-fisted when delivered straight; if the answer to the question of “What are you supposed to learn from this?” is handed to you on a platter, then even a child will turn away and can avoid the lesson altogether. But these tales take a different approach. They teach without teaching, and let the reader learn without learning. Most readers might be surprised by the extreme nature of the stepmother's actions in a story like “The Juniper Tree”, where her method of solving her problems involves beheading her stepson (Grimm 214). But the underlying lessons do still shine through: cruelty and murder are wrong, but being kind and helping others will eventually help you in turn.

One thing you quickly learn while studying these stories is that not every tale has the quintessential happy ending, but I've always felt they were important to be read none the less. Whether it was a tragic ending like Andersen's “The Little Mermaid”, or a sad inevitability like the death of “The Little Matchstick Girl”, there is a lesson to be learned, even in tragedy (Andersen). Now, the trick with these written stories, is that the bias of both the author and translators come through. Andersen, like the Brothers Grimm, compiled many of his stories from variations on tales he heard while traveling, or from the people around him. Eventually, they were written down in some format, with more or less explanation of origin being given



for each. In *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*, Editor Maria Tartar explains before each tale a brief history of how each story came to be (xv-xxi). Some have long, storied histories, where a tale had been well known in a region, and was preserved as best possible. Others were cobbled together piecemeal from a variety of different stories—one of the most familiar of the bunch would be “The Singing, Soaring Lark” (Grimm 317). From the first lines, it is clearly an interpretation of *Beauty and the Beast*; everything is there from the merchant father who sets out to bring back gifts for his three daughters, and the youngest wants something unusual, but there it takes a turn, and the heroine instead asks for the titular singing, soaring lark. This is where the Brothers have decided to blend it with something closer to the Norwegian fairy tale “East o’ the Sun and West o’ the Moon”, and the heroine must go rescue her Prince after he has been cursed once again. This blending of stories is not always so obvious, but is especially common amongst the fairy tales from the Western tradition.

While some specific tropes found in fairy tales are both firmly fixed to their time period, such as the great censoring and plot line adjustment that took place during the 18th and 19th centuries, and their region of origin, with stories about siblings and the nature of each depending on the home county’s views on birth order and temperament, the greater archetypes found among these characters seem much more universal when compared across the board (Windling 3). This is not limited to fairy and folk tales, but can be seen in literature across the genres as well. As I grew older and read more widely in school, I was introduced to a number of folk and fairy tales from around the world. While each had their own elements that were strange and foreign to ten year old me, there were also plenty of relatable factors. We had been assigned to read them for that very purpose, and it was something I was glad for as my education moved on. By the time I got to middle school and began studying foreign languages, I began to realize that each country’s spin on each tale had something unique, something that was seemingly still lost in English while the grander thematic meaning was the same. I came to realize just how closely related language and culture were, and how translators might

have one of the most difficult jobs in the world. I realized that I gained so much more from a foreign text if I also knew about that places history and culture, and could better fit what I was reading into context. It was no longer a matter of merely understanding characters and patterns independently, but it became one great wide map of places and people that had all be interconnected, and it was a beautiful thing for me to picture—these stories and characters, these archetypes that in a certain light, tied the world together in a ways I was only beginning to realize.

## Found in Translation

Now, for my work in question. The combined years of study I've done have given me countless opportunities to look at texts from around the world; the Literature track within the English department gave me a great variety of courses to choose from, and I was never for want of a new story. Likewise, my Japanese education frequently included shortened versions of many popular stories that were used for reading and translation exercises, which fleshed out my introduction to the Japanese side of folklore and fairy tales. With all of that in mind, I knew that if I could, I had to be a part of the process that keeps these stories alive.

That goal led to a whole new realm of creative and scholarly decisions that I would have to make as my work progressed. The first step was to choose the stories themselves, and there were several criteria in mind as I did my searching. First of all, the stories I chose to translate had to be feasible. While I had brief introductions to many different folk and fairy tales in my Japanese classes, they were always to the end of learning a certain grammar structure that we had been practicing, or to teach a short cultural lesson. That was all well and good, but I had always been a bit disappointed that even from my earliest days of classes in high school, the fuller versions of those texts were never a set part of our curriculum.

Fast forward to the spring of 2015, when I realized that this was my chance to make the most of my thesis project. So, I started compiling my list of potential titles to translate based off of the stories I remembered from my previous classes, as well as consulting with friends who have also studied Japanese and have encountered some of the other usual fairy tales. As I built this list, I knew there were going to be some issues that would inherently spring up; what if this was too common of a story? What if it was too unknown? How are they going to relate? I couldn't let them all be randomly tied, there would have to be some thread connecting them. I put each potential title on my list against this set of questions. Well, while some would be



considered common in Japan, most certainly aren't here. Speaking from personal experience, even my rather well-read librarian mother had never heard of almost all of my potential stories. So, given that I had always wanted my audience to be a set unfamiliar with Japanese fairy and folk tales, I took that as a step in the right direction. The next question had a similar answer; if the story was unfamiliar to me, then all the better! I could approach the piece unbiased and with a clear head and eyes. As for the third, this took maybe the most time. I wrestled with this for a while, the results of which you will read later. But the gist of it came down to: Why are these fairy tales so important? Why is any fairy tale important? From many of my literature classes, I had a laundry list of reasons that could fill several books. But the core of it always came to the same thing. These stories teach people what matters most; they provide guidance, solace, and examples of what to do when things go wrong. Many critics have tried to downplay their importance by citing periodic hysteria over certain fears or trends of the time in which the story was popularized—and that isn't wholly wrong. One thing in common with fairy and folk tales around the world is that they have a near endless list of variations and retellings, and each have their own merit that deserves its due. With that in mind, I tried to base my story selections around themes and characters that a more Western-oriented audience like the one I have here could recognize, but still find something new within the pages.

The three I settled on were based around the ideas of the child—"Momotaro", the princess—"Princess Kaguya", and the everyman—"The Crane's Repayment". Not only were they archetypal figures that I knew readers could identify right away, they also are good representations of either the good versus evil, or dealing with the consequences of your actions core morals that readers are used to. In an interesting twist, the last is also a story that acts as a name origin tale for a famous site in Japan. With that cross section represented, I knew I was headed in the right direction.

After I had the stories translated, I had several other creative decisions to make. The first was, how was I going to make these stories my own? My translations were quite literal, the

first time through, so I found myself with a bit of creative leeway. One option was to try and radically change something for each story; the setting, the time period--and for a time, that did get some serious thought. But the more I drafted out ideas, I realized that I felt I was losing something important about these stories that I wanted to make sure I kept however I could. The fact is that first and foremost, these stories are from Japan. I knew that if I tried something too different from how the story had fixed itself in my mind, I was going to completely miss the point I had set out to make. One of the goals of this entire project is to show how despite all evidence to the contrary, there are common themes in fairy tales from all over the world, and something can be garnered from each of them. The small details might vary wildly, it's true. And the commonalities might only be on the outside edges of the story or its content. But at the end of the day, these fairy tales like so many others have persevered, and are still recorded and told time and again. Words have power, and it is a power that cannot be taken lightly. One of my favorite quotes on the matter comes from Neil Gaiman paraphrasing G. K. Chesterton, and I think it summarizes why I think this genre as a whole is so important: "Fairy tales are more than true – not because they tell us dragons exist, but because they tell us dragons can be beaten." (Gaiman). Children are smart, and they do not need to be talked down to if you want them to understand you. But as a teller of stories, it is essential to do so with the knowledge that there is every chance that whatever you write might be just what saves a reader when they need it most.

# The Crane's Repayment

## 「鶴の恩返し」

This story was one of the earliest that I decided on, as it was one of the common fairy tale type stories that I was aware of, but had yet to read myself. From the first few pages of “The Crane’s Repayment”, there is a premise of a familiar trope amongst fairy tales—the lonely peasant, who helps someone or something in trouble, and gets some kind of reward (Hashidzume). While Western fairy tales generally play up these lead characters as simpletons or even fools, the solitary nature of Yosaku in our story here helps subvert that trend. Grimm’s tales, and the majority of those of German origin that were so popularized, tried to make their hapless underdog succeed as much as possible. The fact that not only was Yosaku, the protagonist, a slight change, but also the ending was not what reader’s might expect, helped this story stay a strong contender.

What really convinced me to translate this story, from the short list I had assembled, was the fact that the ending was more melancholy than I, and I hope my readers, would expect, if they were used to only the Western canon of tales. I felt this story made a good cultural contrast; as opposed to the “Happily ever after” readers come to in so many Western fairy tales, “Crane’s” ending with the crane leaving, never to return, offers the reader a different kind of closure, one that seemed more common among the Japanese fairy tales I have read throughout my studies. The consequences to Yosaku’s actions are presented matter-of-factly; the story doesn’t shy away from presenting a more realistic take on facing consequences. Like with “Princess Kaguya”, neither of our heroes gets what they want; Yosaku must deal with the fact that because he had uncovered the crane’s secret, she must leave. Likewise, Kaguya cannot run from her destiny, and must ultimately leave her family and the world she knew behind, never to return. Both had a similar atmosphere that I knew I needed to include in my translations.



“The Crane’s Repayment” has a familiar fairy tale premise, to be sure: a solitary, humble farmer helps an injured animal, not expecting any sort of reward. He just helps because it is the right thing to do. And then, of course, unexpectedly good things come into his life. He meets Sayo, who wants nothing but to help him and be his wife, and they are happy for a time. Standard fare for the genre, still. But now it also becomes fantastical: Sayo all along has been that same crane he helped in the field! And because of that, she wanted to repay the favor however she could, even if it meant using her own feathers to make cloth that he could sell to make enough money to live comfortably. Self-sacrifice, or doing what must be done regardless of the cost, are other common themes that I thought were important to note as a recurring thread in these various fairy tales. As stories meant primarily to teach and then entertain, seeing these common themes among many of the tales I looked into, and both “Repayment” and “Kaguya” from this collection, meant that I had touched on something that appeared to be an important cultural note, which lined up nicely with my culture and historical knowledge I had gained through my Japanese history and culture class as well.

The crane: a beautiful bird, with white feathers and an elegant silhouette. In the fall, they fly to Japan from their cold home country. Then, come spring, they return home.

A long time ago, there lived a young man by the name of Yosaku. He lived all by himself. His parents had died many years before, and he had no brothers or sisters.

Yosaku was rather poor. Every day, he would go early to the fields to plant rice. Then, he would work late into the night. No matter how much he worked, Yosaku's life was always the same.

Then, one day, Yosaku was working in the fields like he always did. Fall had ended, and the leaves were changing into brilliant reds and yellows. Evening was coming, and the sky was turning red. The entire scene was beautiful to see. Yosaku paused in his work, and decided to take in the view. "How pretty it all is. Still, winter will come soon....the wind is turning cold."

As he said this, Yosaku turned to look towards the mountains. As he watched, a white bird flew from beyond the mountains. It was a crane! It was a white and very beautiful crane, and it slowly flew towards Yosaku. It flew over the field for a bit, and then came to land.

“Ah, this year the cranes returned again. It’s such a beautiful bird,” he said to himself. Yosaku watched the crane for a time. The crane had descended, and was not moving. “What’s wrong?”

He walked over to the crane. The bird was surprised, and tried to fly away, but it couldn’t. Yosaku looked the bird over, and found that its leg was injured. “That looks like it hurts! You can’t fly like this.”

Yosaku took the crane back with him to his house, and tended to the bird’s leg. Several days passed, and the crane’s leg healed well. “Well then, looks like you’re healthy and ready to fly. Now you can fly wherever you’d like!” The crane happily went outside. It took off, circled overhead, and flew off to the distant mountains.



Winter came. The fields, the forests, the mountains—everything became a snow-covered white.

One day, it had been snowing since that morning. That night, Yosaku sat by the fire, making a bamboo basket. It was very cold, and the wind was growing stronger. Yosaku thought about going to sleep early, and he began to get up.

**KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!**

Yosaku was surprised by the sound. With it snowing like this, who would be outside? He wondered. He opened the door a bit, to find a woman in a white kimono standing there.

“What’s the matter?” The woman surprised him, and he asked the first thing that came to mind.

The woman’s voice was quiet and small. “I was going to the neighboring village, but I seem to have gotten lost on the way. I’m sorry for the trouble, but would it be alright if I stayed here until morning?” She seemed very tired.

“Yes, of course! It’s so cold out, please, come inside,” Yosaku kindly replied, and ushered the woman into the house.

The two of them sat by the fire to warm up. “What is your name?”

“I am called Sayo,” the woman replied. She undid the cloth she had used as a hood while out in the snow.

What a pretty person! Yosaku was surprised. She was a young and beautiful looking woman. Face as white as snow, and long dark hair; I’ve never seen a person this pretty before, he thought.

The snow kept falling, and the wind refused to let up. The pair continued to talk through the evening. “It’s a bit small, but, please, rest here as long as you need to. It’s no trouble.

Sayo gratefully relaxed, and bowed her head. “Thank you very much.”



The snow fell for many more days. Sayo stayed all that time, helping Yosaku with his work, and cooking and cleaning. Yosaku began to like her very much, and thought it might be nice for her to always be around.

Eventually, Yosaku decided to ask. "Sayo, do you really have to go on to the next village? I've always been here alone, and it does get lonely. But since you've been here, I've been so happy. So, if you'd like, please stay here and marry me."

Sayo was a bit embarrassed when she heard him, but replied in kind. "I've been very happy here as well, and I also think I would like being your wife. I will stay forever if I can."

Yosaku was thrilled, but had more to add. "Sayo, I am happy to hear you say that, but, I am also very poor, and life is almost always hard...will you be alright with that?"

Her reply was immediate. "Yes. No matter how tough, we will be together forever."

So, the two were soon married.

Time passed, and spring arrived. The snow melted away, and the flowers began to bloom. Yosaku began again his daily work in the rice paddies, Sayo made the day's food, and waited for his return.

One day, Sayo had something on her mind. "Yosaku, I have a favor to ask."

"A favor?"

"Yes. Would it be alright if I used the spare room to weave?"

The spare room with the loom had been Yosaku's mother's—but he had not used it since she had died.

"Of course, that's fine," was his quick reply.

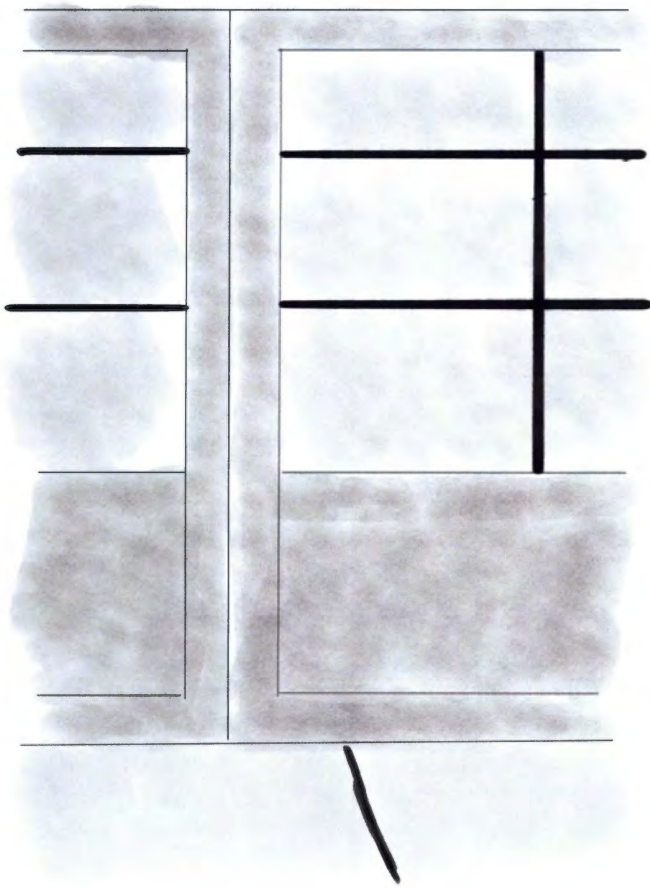
"I think I'd like to start weaving today," Sayo decided.

"Today, right now?"

"Yes, and for the next seven days. But, during that time, you cannot bother me or look into the room. Can you promise me that?"

Yosaku thought her request a little strange, but replied "I promise."

Then, from morning until night, Sayo spent every day weaving.



## CLICK CLACK CLICK CLACK

Went the loom, every day. Finally, the seventh day ended. Sayo emerged, a bit thinner, and not as lively as before. She passed the cloth she had woven to her husband. "Please, take this and sell it in town," she said in a tired voice.

Yosaku looked at this cloth, and was surprised at its beauty. He had never seen it's like before in his life. He exclaimed his glad surprised aloud to his wife, and quickly left.

He went straight to the town, and all the people gathered there were surprised as well.

"What beautiful cloth!"

"It's so soft, and so light!"

"I didn't think there was cloth of this high quality!"

Needless to say, the cloth sold for a high price. Yosaku returned home very pleased. When he showed Sayo the money, he exclaimed “Sayo, the cloth sold so very well. Look, I’ve got all the money here!”

He held out the money in the bag he had taken with him, and watched her face at the news. Eventually, he asked “Sayo, why did you make such beautiful cloth?” But he received no reply.

Instead, she said “I will make more of the same cloth again. But, please, leave me to my work?” and she entered the weaving room once more.

Another week passed, and when she was finished, she once more passed the new bolt of cloth to Yosaku. “Please, go and sell this in the town.” And again, he sold it for a very high price.

Sayo wove the beautiful cloth often from then on. Yosaku took it all to the town, and suddenly found himself with a lot of money. He wasn’t sure how his wife kept weaving the cloth, but he made sure to keep his promise and did not look into the room.

One day, when she came back from the weaving room, he noticed how tired she looked. “As she makes the cloth, she gets thinner and thinner. I wonder why?” he thought. “I wonder how she does it—what does she use to make such fine cloth? ...I wonder why I cannot look into the room.”

The next day, he could hear the usual CLICK CLACK-ing sound from the loom. By this point, Yosaku knew his curiosity was getting the better of him. He desperately wanted to know what Sayo was doing. While he remembered his promise, it had been so long, surely just a small look wouldn’t bother her.

Yosaku stood in front of the room, and pulled the door aside only a bit. When he looked inside, he saw...



“Ah!!!” He was so startled his voice escaped him. Sayo was not inside the room. Instead, in her place, was a crane! A white crane was weaving at the loom. It was using its own feathers, one by one, to weave the beautiful cloth that he had been selling in the village. The crane looked up at Yosaku. “I asked you not to look in here, and you had promised... what are you doing there?”



Yosaku was so surprised, he found he couldn't move. He stood there, unsure of what to say. The crane spoke again. “Yosaku, do you remember? You helped a wounded crane out in the fields—I am that crane. I was so happy, then. You really are a kind person. I wanted to show my gratitude, so I became a human so I could be by your side. But...”

The crane's body had few feathers left, and it had grown very thin. Its voice was weak, and sad. “Now you know that I am that crane. So, I can no longer stay here.” Tears fell from the bird's eyes.

“Sayo!” Yosaku exclaimed, and he entered the room.

The crane held out the cloth it had been working on. “This is the final bolt of cloth. For your sake, I worked hard to finish it. Please, think of this as what I've left behind, and take good care of it.” The crane handed off the cloth, and fled the room, crying.

“Wait! Sayo!” Yosaku called to the bird.



“Farewell, Yosaku. I will never regret the time I spent living with you.” The crane flew up into the sky.

“Wait, Sayo! Come back!” he called out, but the crane was already flying high in the sky.

Yosaku looked to the sky and ran. Again and again he called out, but the crane would not descend. It flew overhead, and made three looping circles. It cried in a sad tone, and then, flew beyond the distant mountains.

The crane would never return.

# Momotaro

## 「桃太郎」

I wanted to include Momotaro in this collection for a few reasons. Firstly, “Momotaro” is a story in the popular tradition of young heroes who set out to save the day, sometimes for no other reason than they can (Oda). Set against a common theme of an uncommon beginning, in this case our hero was found in a giant peach, taken in by the old woman and her husband who found him. His quick age transition to his journey to defeat the demons does make this a shorter story than the others, but also works well in the vein of it being a shorter, more child oriented story. It is all about Momotaro’s success, and his journey and making friends along the way.

Children’s stories about children themselves might be some of the most important stories on record. While I believe that you don’t have to be a child to appreciate or learn things from fairy tales, I do also recognize that there is a special element to most of them that makes them particularly accessible, and angled towards younger readers and listeners. But children are the most important audience for several reasons; firstly, they have everything to learn, and almost nothing to lose. Even today we find ourselves in a fight to validate children’s and young adult literature, because some critics stalwartly believe that if something is not “classic” it has almost no use. That could not be farther from the truth. As a young listener and reader, there are common lessons that have clearly been helpful to learn and remember for years and years, the world over. In this particular case, while a bit simple, Momotaro knows that what the demons are doing is not right. You should not hurt people, or take their things as your own. And so

he sets out to right those wrongs, because it is the right thing to do. Likewise, the presence of his companions helps fit the story neatly into line with the tradition of talking animal companions. The dog, monkey, and pheasant all lend different strengths to Momotaro to aid him: the pheasant's flight and ability to see farther, most notably, but they also emphasize the importance of companionship, and working together to achieve a goal. While I don't think any of these would be considered "typical", I feel that most readers will smile at the familiarity of the spirit of the story.

A long time ago, there lived an old couple. Every day Grandpa would go to gather branches and twigs that had fallen to the ground, while Grandma went to the river to wash the laundry.

One day, while Grandma was doing the laundry, she heard a great sound—something was burbling downstream. A giant peach came floating down the river! Grandma was surprised.

“My, what a large peach! I’ll take it home, and then Grandpa and I will eat it together.” So, she took the giant peach home with her.

Night fell, and Grandpa came home from the mountain.

“Grandpa, look at this! A great peach came down the river today.”

“Ah, that is quite the giant peach!” Grandpa was delighted.

“Now, we can eat!” And Grandma went to cut up the peach. But, to her great surprise, a baby boy was inside the giant fruit!

The old couple was stunned.

“A child inside the peach?”

“And what an energetic child, too!”





The two did not have any children, and so they adopted the child as their own.

Grandpa proudly declared, “Because this child was born from a peach, his name will be Momotaro—the peach boy.”

Momotaro was raised as their own. He ate and ate, and he grew bigger, and as he got older, Momotaro also became very strong. Around that time, terrible demons from Demon Island had come to the village. They were destroying things and stealing from the villagers. The people were very troubled.

One day, Momotaro was talking with Grandpa and Grandma.

“Grandpa, Grandma, I am no longer a child. I will go to Demon Island, and fight the demons there. And, then I will return all of the things that have been stolen from the village.”

“It is too dangerous, you cannot go!” They exclaimed.

But, no matter how often they told him, he always replied “I will be okay.”

Eventually, the couple relented. “I see. If you are so determined, go.”

For his journey, Grandma made a batch of millet dumplings, while Grandpa built a flag. It read, “Best in Japan” in big, bold strokes. Momotaro took the dumplings and the flag. “Grandma, Grandpa, thank you so much! Then, I’m off!” He began his journey in high spirits.

Momotaro walked for a while. Soon, he heard a dog. “Bark bark!” And the dog ran up to him.

“Momotaro, Momotaro, what do you have there?” the dog asked.



“This? These are delicious kibidango, millet dumplings, Grandma made,” the boy replied.

“Please let me have one!”

“Okay, sure! Here you go.” Momotaro gave a millet dumpling to the dog. “I’m on my way to Demon Island. I’m going to fight the demons.”

“Bark bark.” The dog replied. “Well, I’ll go with you!”

Momotaro and the dog set out, and had walked a ways more. Then, they heard the “Kee kee!” screech of a monkey, and one came out to meet them.

“Momotaro, Momotaro, what do you have there?” the monkey asked.

“This? These are delicious millet dumplings Grandma made,” the boy replied.

“Okay, sure! Here you go.” Momotaro gave a millet dumpling to the monkey. “I’m on my way to Demon Island. I’m going to fight the demons.”

“Kee kee!” The monkey screeched. “Well, I’ll go with you!”

Momotaro, and the dog, and the monkey, all set out, and had walked a little ways more.

Then, a pheasant called, “Caw caw!” and flew over.

“Momotaro, Momotaro, what do you have there?”

“This? These are delicious millet dumplings Grandma made,” the boy replied.

“Please let me have one!”

“That’s fine, here you go.” Momotaro gave a millet dumpling to the pheasant. “I’m on my way to Demon Island. I’m going to fight the demons.”

“Caw caw. Well, I’ll go with you!”

As they went, they realized that Demon Island was far away. When Momotaro, the dog, the monkey, and the pheasant grew tired, they ate millet dumplings, and began to walk again.

Eventually, Momotaro’s group came to the sea. They would have to cross the water to get to Demon Island. So, everyone boarded a little boat, and they rowed out to sea.

The dog grew tired of the water. “Bark bark! Momotaro, are we at Demon Island yet?”

The pheasant, who was flying overhead, cried out. “Demon Island! Demon Island ahead!”

The island was spotted! “I will go and look!” the pheasant called, and it flew off towards the island.



Soon, the bird returned. “Caw caw! The demons are all drinking sake, and singing songs. They’re distracted!”

Their boat arrived at Demon Island.

Momotaro, the dog, the monkey, and the pheasant all went ashore to explore the island. There, they found the demons drinking, laughing, and telling stories in booming voices. They also saw that some had already fallen asleep.

With the element of surprise, Momotaro leapt out and cried, “I am the strongest in Japan, Momotaro!” And so he drew his katana and fought the demons. The dog and the monkey and the pheasant all helped in the battle as well. The dog bit the demons, the monkey scratched them, and the pheasant pecked at them with its beak.

“Ouch, ouch!” cried the demons. Momotaro and his friends were much stronger than the demons had first thought. The demons found that they could fight no longer.

The strongest demon came forward, and apologized. “We’re sorry, we’re sorry. We cannot fight you anymore.”

“Alright, I understand! But from now on, you cannot do anything bad! No more fighting, or stealing, or bothering the villagers!” replied Momotaro.

The head demon agreed. “Yes, okay. We can do that. We won’t do bad things any longer. We will return everything we took from the villagers, and then we promise to leave them alone.”

Momotaro, the dog, the monkey, and the pheasant rounded up the items the demon’s had stolen, and took them back to the village. The people were elated—their things all returned, and a promise that they would be left in peace! Grandma and Grandpa were also very happy to have Momotaro home safe and sound, where he continued to live and have fun every day. And they all lived happily ever after.



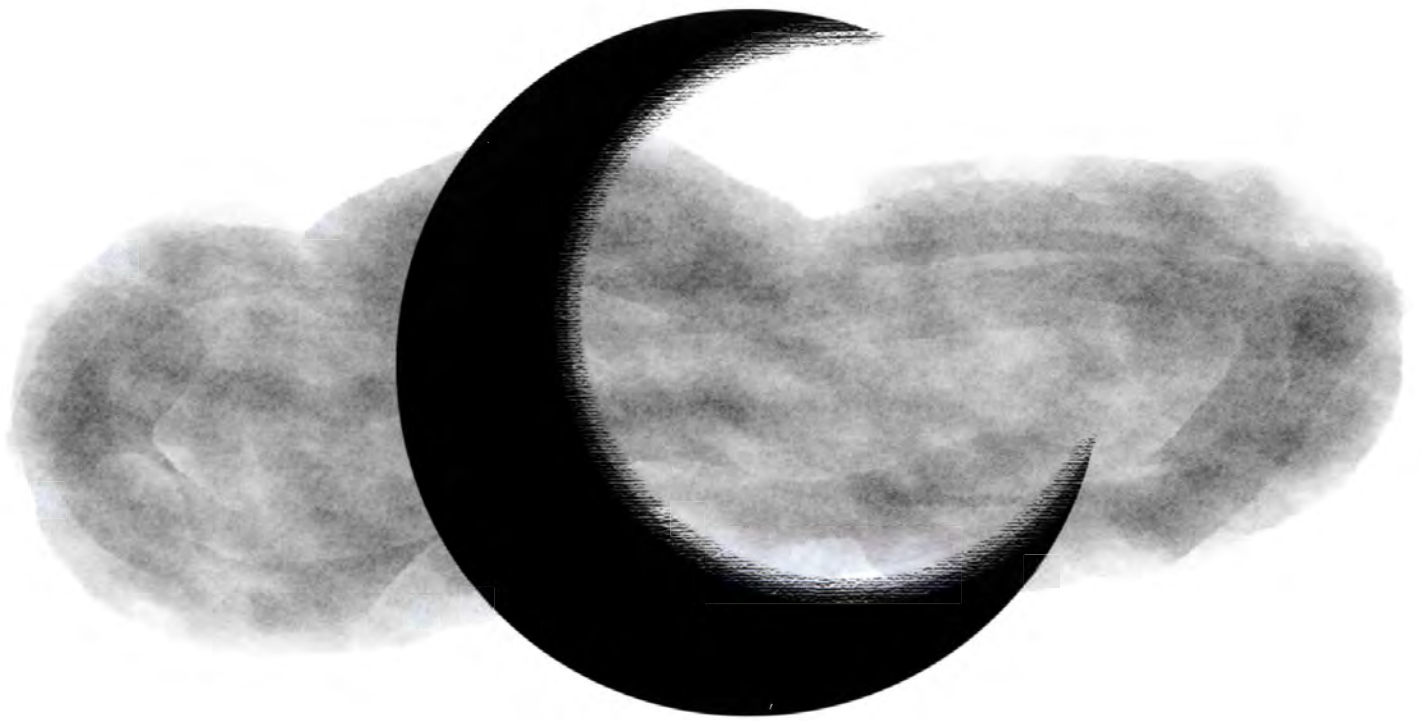


# Princess Kaguya

## 「かぐや姫」

I thought this would be a fitting story to present, because it speaks to the seemingly world-wide fascination with princesses who have mysterious origins making good subjects for fairy tales; it also blends itself with the greater ending of how a very famous place, Mount Fuji, received its name (Takahashi). Both key components to the story made sure it had a near guaranteed spot on my list of stories. It seems that regardless of the time or place, tales of princesses about as one of the most common sub-genre of fairy tales and related stories. Take one glance at any children's library, and you'll find shelf after shelf of various Princesses from all over-you're almost always a stone's throw away from the next princess story book.

Be it through old fairy tale anthologies, or the variety of Disney films and their own take on the genre, as widespread as the archetype was, I knew this was something I had to explore with this set of fairy tales. Every country and every culture has their own take on the princess story. In many cases, the same Princess story is told in a variety of ways, such as "Cinderella". However, "Princess Kaguya" does not fit as neatly into any of the well-known Western princess lore. From humble if mystical origins, she grows up to be a beautiful woman, as most princesses are wont to do. But when the suitors appear, she does her best to turn them away as much as possible, going so far as to giving them impossible tasks to complete in order to win her hand. Even after the suitors are dealt with, there is still the matter of Kaguya being not of this world, but from the moon. Kaguya's ultimate departure also leads to something I had not expected to find, which turned out to be an origin tale for how Mount Fuji got its name. The story is a fascinating blend from my perspective, and I thought she was a good example of a different kind of Princess that I wanted to translate as my way to try working in this timeless section of the genre.



A long time ago, there lived an old couple. Every day, Grandpa would go to the bamboo thickets, cut down the stalks, and made baskets and strainers. They made a living selling what baskets and strainers they made.

One day, Grandpa entered the thicket, like always. But then, some sort of sparkling light appeared!

“This is unusual. What on earth could be shining like that?”

Grandpa went over to see if he could find the source of the light. As he got closer, he realized the glowing was coming from some of the bamboo. “It seems like something must be inside!” And so, Grandpa cut the stalk of bamboo, and looked inside. And then...

There was a small girl resting inside! “Oh, my! What a cute child!”

Grandpa immediately took the girl home with him. Grandma was elated—the two had no children of their own to take care of before.

“From today on, this girl will be our child. We will call her Princess Kaguya.” Grandpa declared. Her name meant ‘The girl shining with light’; very fitting, if you asked the old couple.



Grandma and Grandpa raised Kaguya with great care. But now that she was around, strange things began to happen. When Grandpa was out cutting bamboo, money would come out of the stalks after they were cut! Grandpa and Grandma became very rich, then. The first thing they did was build a large house.

“Grandpa, our Kaguya is so darling, isn’t she? Since she’s been here, I can’t remember having more fun.”

“You’re right, Grandma. Even when I’m tired from a day’s work, when I see that child, I’m full of life and energy again!”

The couple were so very happy that Kaguya had come into their lives.

As she grew up, she became a beautiful woman. Her beauty was so great, her name became known throughout the land. Many young men came to meet the fair Princess Kaguya. With the additional people around the house, it became very lively.

“Please, allow me to marry Princess Kaguya!” they clamored, asking Grandpa and Grandma for her hand. But Kaguya refused to meet with any of them. Still, there were five determined suitors among them who returned every day with the same request.

The group approached together. “I want to meet Princess Kaguya!” “And me.” “And me!” they insisted.

“I want to marry Princess Kaguya!” “And me!” “And me!” they said.

Grandpa and Grandma were very troubled over this. Their Kaguya did not want to marry anyone, least of all now. Still, the suitors were persistent, and something had to be done.

“I will meet them. Please bring them here.” Kaguya declared.



The five young men anxiously listened. She eventually spoke: "If you are truly serious in your pursuit for my hand, then please listen carefully. Go and find these items that I seek, and whoever brings one to me will be the man that I marry."

"You, please fetch me Buddha's Bowl."

"You, the Pearl-Growing Tree."

"You, the Un-burnable Jacket."

"You, the Dragon Ball."

"And you, the Shell from the Swallow's Nest."

These were all things that were legendary, true, but so legendary they had never been seen. The five suitors were troubled. How could they do the impossible? Still, if they could do as she wished, then their goal to marry her would be realized. With that determination, they each set out to find their legendary token.

Three years passed. Eventually, one suitor returned with the Pearl-Growing Tree. It was sparkling with a beautiful light. The young man stepped forward, and addressed Kaguya.

"I looked far and wide, and in foreign lands to be able to bring this Tree back to you. I spent countless months on this difficult search, and have succeeded. With this in mind, please, will you marry me?"

Kaguya was worried. She had not expected anyone to actually succeed. As she was thinking, the young man came forward.

“Actually...this tree is one that we made. It took three years, but we managed to do it. Still, it was three years of effort, and we have been left poor. Please, if there is any money you could at least give us...”

The tree was a fake! And yet they still presented it. But, the young man’s conscience won out, and he left in shame.

The remaining four suitors never brought back the items that Kaguya had sent them to look for.

Eventually, word of Kaguya’s beauty reached even the Emperor’s ears. He decided that he should meet this woman, who was now so famous. With the power he held as Emperor, nothing was impossible. He had received everything he had ever wanted.

“Bring me Princess Kaguya,” he told his servant. And so the servant went, planning to return with Kaguya in tow. But when he reached her house...

“I will not go.” And so, she remained at home. After that, the servant went time and again to talk to her. Each time, he would ask her to return with him, but she never once changed her mind. When he had heard enough refusals, the Emperor made up his mind.

“Well then, I will just have to go and speak with her myself.” So the Emperor himself went to Grandpa and Grandma’s house to meet Kaguya.

Just like everyone else, he was struck by her beauty from the moment he met her. He had never seen such a beautiful person before.

“Kaguya, please marry me,” he finally declared.

“I cannot do that. I cannot go with you,” she quietly replied. Even so, the Emperor had made up his own mind.

“Well, we’ll just go back together.” He did fully intend to take her back with him. But then, something strange happened—Kaguya’s body became invisible! This came as quite a shock.

“Princess Kaguya, Princess Kaguya! Where are you, what happened?” the Emperor exclaimed. “I won’t take you with me, so please, let me see you one last time.” After he finished speaking, Kaguya could be seen, once again.

The Emperor did not have Kaguya return with him. But no matter how much time passed, he could not forget her striking beauty. So, he began to write her letters. And sometimes, Kaguya would write a letter in return.

And so, three more years passed. As spring came, Kaguya began to look at the moon every night. With each day, she seemed more and more lonely. This continued through the summer. She would again look at the moon, and would frequently begin to cry. Grandpa and Grandma were very worried.

“Why are you crying like that?” they would ask.

“It is nothing,” was always her reply.

August came. The full moon was quickly approaching, with the moon growing more and more round each night.

The day before the full moon, Kaguya had been crying since the morning. The near full moon rose that night, and Kaguya went to speak to Grandpa and Grandma.

“I am not from this world,” she began. “I came from the moon. Tomorrow, as promised to the people of the moon, I must return to them. Tomorrow is the promised night of the full moon, and I must go.” This shocked Grandpa and Grandma. Who would have guessed such a thing?



“What? You...came from the moon?” For a while, the couple sat in stunned silence. They had no idea what to say. Finally, they sadly continued, “Our dear Princess is not of this world, we can understand that. But, you, Kaguya, are our treasured daughter. We have no idea what we will do without you here. Please, if there is any way, please don’t go!”

“I also do not wish to say farewell. That is why I have been crying, gazing at the moon each night. But, I can do nothing to stop this.” Kaguya began to cry as she spoke.

Grandpa told the Emperor the news as quickly as he could. He immediately called on his two-thousand strong soliders.

“Go to Kaguya’s home. And, when the people from the moon arrive, you must not let them take Kaguya, no matter what!”

And so the day of the full moon arrived, and with it, two thousand soldiers to Kaguya’s home.

Grandpa had Kaguya stay inside, and then tightly shut the door. He locked it, and stood in front of the door. Grandma stayed inside with Kaguya, and sat holding her hand. The couple would do whatever they could to keep Kaguya there—they would not let anyone take their Princess away.

Night fell, and the full moon gave off a great light. The light steadily grew brighter and brighter, and soon, it was as bright as midday around the house. Then, from inside the light, something began to descend.



As they looked closer, it was a cloud! The people from the moon had been riding inside the cloud. A beautiful, regal looking carriage also landed in the garden. The cloud, the carriage, and the people from the moon, all gave off a great light of their own.

As soon as the soldiers saw the people descend, they found themselves powerless. Many collapsed, unable to stand.

Then, a woman descended from the cloud to stand before the rest. She spoke in a loud voice:

“Today is the promised day. We have come to take Kaguya home.” Everyone there was struck by the same thought—what would happen next?

CLACK CLACK CLACK

At once, all of the doors to the house flew open. Kaguya slowly stood up, and no one could move to stop her. Grandma was still inside, crying. Kaguya left the house, and without hurrying, went outside. She motioned to Grandpa and Grandma, who moved to meet her.

“You have raised me, and always thought of me as your own. Thank you so much for your kindness. Thank you so very much. From now on, whenever you look at the moon, please, think of me.” She was crying as she spoke, her sadness apparent to all. Then, she wrote a letter, addressed to the Emperor. “I regret it has to be this way, but I must return to the moon. Please, be well,” she wrote.

From the people of the moon, she took a small bundle—it contained something they called the “medicine of immortality”. Taking both the medicine and the letter, she went once more to Grandpa, and gave him both.

“Please, pass this on to the Emperor, from me. If he drinks this, he will not die, and live forever more.”

At that time, more people from the moon stepped forward, and presented Kaguya with a beautiful kimono that she then put on. Then, a change came over her. She forgot everything about her life until that point, and truly became one of the people from the moon. Grandma and Grandpa, her childhood, the fun things and sad things, the good and the bad—she forgot them all, and would not remember any of them.

Kaguya boarded the beautiful carriage from the sky, and returned to the moon with the rest of her people.

The emperor was greatly saddened when he heard that Kaguya had returned to the moon. He read her letter, and his grief only grew. He poured over the letter, and medicine of immortality that she had sent him.

“I do not wish to live a long life, if Kaguya is not here to share it with. This medicine of immortality is something that I do not need.” He called to his servants, “Take this medicine to the tallest mountain in Japan, and burn it.”

The servants dutifully climbed the tallest mountain, and there burned the medicine of immortality from the people of the moon. The smoke rose higher and higher, until it seemed to reach even the moon, where Kaguya was.

To the people who read this story: know that the mountain became known as Fuji no Yama, the Mountain of Immortality. And that with time, it was called the “Mountain of Fuji”, and is now what we today know as Mount Fuji.

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